

Testimony presented by Marcia DuFore
On behalf of North Central Regional Mental Board
Before the Human Services Committee
January 27, 2015

IN SUPPORT OF
S.B. No. 280 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
And
S.B. No. 283 AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished Senators and Representatives of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Marcia DuFore. I am writing to you as Executive Director of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board (NCRMHB). Our Board's responsibility is to study the mental health needs of people in our region and assist the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) with setting priorities for improved and expanded services to meet those needs. Our constituents include people who use mental health and addiction services, their families and concerned citizens in the towns and cities where services are delivered. Many of our constituents live in poverty and rely on programs offered by the Department of Social Services to meet their medical and cash assistance needs.

We appreciate and thank you for your focused attention on critical services that maintain a safety net for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Our concerns for this legislative session are threefold: to defend individual liberties, preserve the safety net, and promote access to the services and supports necessary for people to lead lives in recovery from mental health and addiction challenges.

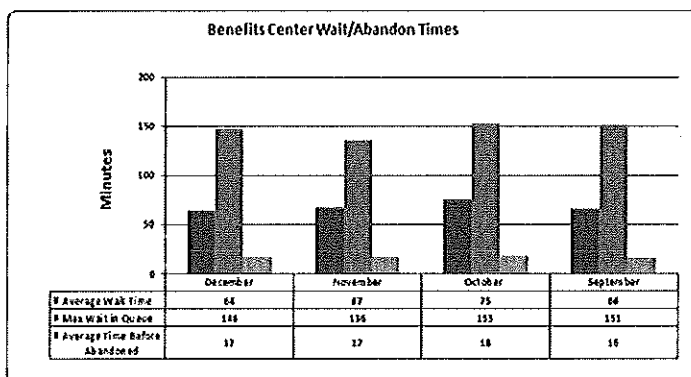
The efficiency and effectiveness of the CT Medicaid program has a significant impact on two of those concerns: preserving the safety net and promoting access. Today you will hear the stories of people, many of whom are our constituents who are among the 94,000 calls that were answered by the ConneCT Benefits Center last month. Many of them waited over an hour to talk with someone about their eligibility, re-determination of eligibility, lost forms or additional paperwork needed to clarify or complete their application. Some of them were

among the 64,000 people who gave up after waiting longer than the minutes their cell phone would allow. Some went without benefits, not for lack of trying, but because of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the Department of Social Services and their management of the Medicaid program. We hear over and over again that DSS lacks adequate staffing and infrastructure to manage the work that needs to be done.

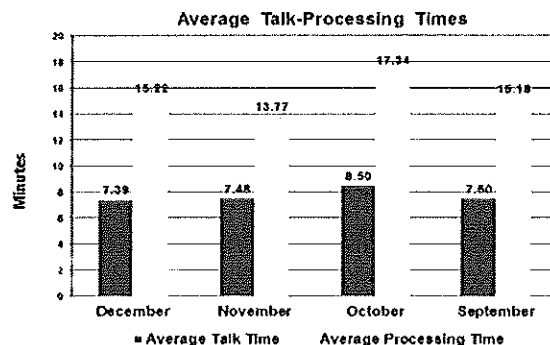
We applaud you for wanting to take a serious look at this program and take action to address the many changes that are needed. A suggestion that was offered last legislative session was to maintain benefits while re-determination of eligibility is in process, understanding that recipient should not be made to suffer because DSS is backlogged. Another is to move to an annual eligibility review instead of a six months review. Either solution would alleviate some suffering. We agree with the proponents of these bills that serious study is needed.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ConneCT Public Dashboard – December 2014

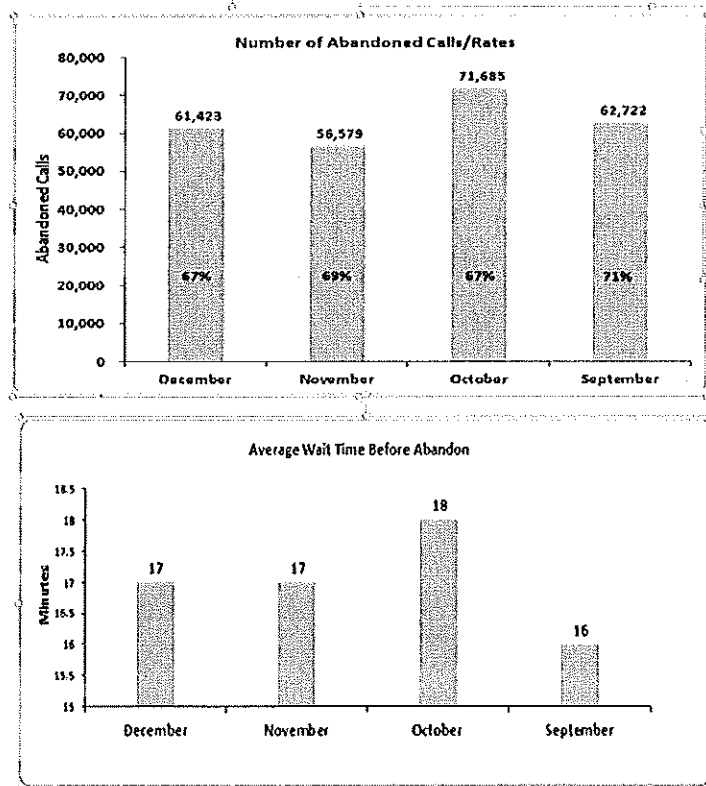


- The average wait time for those who entered the queue to speak to a worker



- Average length of time workers talk to caller
- Average length of time workers take to process a case after speaking with caller

ConneCT Public Dashboard – December 2014



- Calls that entered the queue to speak to a worker but caller disconnected before worker responded

- From the abandoned calls, the average wait time from when the caller entered the queue to speak to a worker until caller hung up before a worker responded

Data as of December 31st, 2014

At a January 2015 presentation to the Council of Medical Assistance Program Oversight, the Department of Social Services and Access Health CT were described as partners providing health coverage to Connecticut residents. They asserted that the partnership between ConneCT and Access Health CT provides a system with “no wrong door.”

We believe there should be no wrong door for people seeking services or information. This is such an important issue for all of us concerned about our community’s health to embrace and take responsibility for. We urge you to move forward with your study and hope you will consider these our comments in your deliberations.

We do thank you for your time, interest, and attention.

Sincerely, Marcia DuFore